

FIRE BLIGHT OF PYRACANTHA

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Firethorn, *Pyracantha* spp., is a large, hardy evergreen shrub which is popular throughout Florida. It is noted for its abundant, small, white flowers followed by large masses of bright red, berry-like fruits. Firethorn is used as an accent or specimen plant, in border plantings, and is often grown against the walls of houses as espaliers (1).

SYMPTOMS. Fire blight, caused by the bacterium *Erwinia amylovora* (Bun.) Winslow, is the most serious disease of this plant. It attacks firethorn in the spring, usually entering through the flowers (Fig. 1). Infection spreads rapidly to new shoots which wilt suddenly, turn brown to black, and die. The dead leaves persist on the shoots (2). The disease is most serious during warm, rainy periods or under overhead irrigation. Bees, as well as splashing water, are important in the spread of the bacterium.



Fig. 1. Limb of firethorn showing early stage of infection through the flowers and advancing into the stem.

CONTROL. Complete control of this disease is difficult; however, spraying the plants on a 5 to 7 day interval during flowering time with 60 to 100 ppm streptomycin helps protect blooms from infection. Prune out diseased branches well below sign of infection. Use resistant varieties such as P. coccinea f. lalandii or P. angustifolia.

#### Literature Cited

1. Bush, C. S. 1969. Flowers, shrubs and trees for Florida homes. Fla. Dept. Agr. and Cons. Serv. Bull. 195. p. 138-140.
2. Pirone, P. P. 1970. Diseases and pests of ornamental plants. Ronald Press Co., New York. p. 423.